



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Namibia

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 320,827 square miles, and its population is approximately 1.8 million. Over 90 percent of citizens identify themselves as Christian. The two largest denominations are the Lutheran and Roman Catholic Churches, while smaller numbers are affiliated with the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons). There are also a number of Zionist Churches (a mixture of traditional African beliefs and Pentecostal Christianity), especially in urban areas. The Afrikaner ethnic group is the predominant patron of the Dutch Reformed Church of Namibia.

The Himba, an ethnic group that constitutes less than 1 percent of the population, practice a traditional indigenous religion oriented toward their natural environment in the desert northwest. The San people, who constitute less than 3 percent of the population, also practice a traditional indigenous religion. Other religions include Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and the Baha'i Faith. Practitioners of these religions predominantly are immigrants, descendents of immigrants, or recent converts. They reside primarily in urban areas. There are few atheists in the country.

Foreign missionary groups, including Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Baptists, Mormons, and Baha'is, operate in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. There is no state religion, nor does the Government subsidize any particular denomination.

The Government does not formally recognize any religion. However, government and senior ruling party officials continue to publicly emphasize the role of three Christian denominations--Anglican, Lutheran, and Roman Catholic--in mobilizing political support during the country's struggle for independence.

There are no registration requirements for religious organizations.

The Government recognizes the holy days of Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, and Christmas Day as national holidays.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. In April, the Council of Churches of Namibia elected as President a member of the Dutch Reformed Church and as General Secretary a member of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. U.S. Embassy representatives had frequent contact with citizens and foreign visitors from a wide variety of religious faiths. The Embassy continued to support activities that encourage religious tolerance and respect for human rights through the Democracy and Human Rights Fund.

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